

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 3 • Wednesday, July 21, 2004

Olympic dreams

Five Texas A&M graduates attempt to grab gold at summer games

By John Lowery
THE BATTALION

For most students in College Station, stepping across the stage and receiving that degree is an exciting but scary moment. As with most big transitions in life, the profound questions abound: Where will I go? How long can I make rent working at Fat Burger? Now that I have this great liberal arts degree, will my parents let me live with them for another twenty years? And for an extraordinary few: Can I take home Olympic gold?

This summer, a handful of former student Aggie standouts will be traveling to Greece to compete in the 2004 Olympic Games. All have one thing on their mind: winning the gold.

Chris Pinnock, a four-time All-American hurdler will be representing Jamaica in the men's 110-meter hurdles in Athens. Pinnock moved to the United States when he was a teenager and has been running since the age of sixteen. Pinnock transferred to Texas A&M from Barton County Community College and was able to compete for two seasons as an Aggie. Pinnock captured the Big 12 Championship his final year, making him the second best hurdler in school history. He also left with the Big 12 record in the 110-meter hurdles with a time of 13.38 seconds — a task Pinnock said is his greatest accomplishment up to this point in his career. Pinnock said he is proud of his heritage and is proud to have been an Aggie, but isn't sure if one outweighs the other in his life.

"Which is stronger, I don't know exactly," Pinnock said. "Only that I want the world to know I am a proud Texas A&M Aggie and a Jamaican."

Pinnock said he believes his chances of getting gold are good,

because he is the athlete that "shows up and shocks people when it counts the most." Pinnock said his desire to represent his country and alma mater is a priority and assured the A&M population he would give a Gig'em on television if he won.

"Representing Jamaica at the Olympics is something that Chris Pinnock has aspired to do for a long, long time," said A&M hurdles coach Abe Brown in an interview with The Eagle. "I'm extremely proud and excited for him."

Fellow Aggie track athlete Angeles Pantoja will also be competing in the Olympics this August. Pantoja was recently placed on the Mexican national track team. The multitalented Aggie is a two-time Big 12 Champion in the 1,000-meter run, 2002 Mexican National Champion and is among the top-10 all-time performers at A&M in the 800 meter. Pantoja holds records in the indoor 800- and 1,000-meter runs and the indoor distance medley relay.

Former A&M volleyball standout Stacy Sykora will also be vying for the gold this summer. The two-time All-American was recently given a spot on the U.S. Women's team, making it her second appearance as an Olympian. Although medals alluded the team in the 2000 games, rankings suggest she and team U.S.A. have a good shot at capturing a medal this time around, as they are pre-ranked in second place.

Sykora has been participating in tournaments in Asia and Italy preparing for the Olympics and said being on an Olympic team is no easy task.

"Everything has been difficult in all aspects," Sykora said. "I have given my life to the sport. I don't get to see my family, my nephew grows, my dog. I am out of the country practically all year except for a few months. English becomes my second language. I could not narrow it down to one thing that is difficult; it is what I revolve and what I

have revolved my life around for four years."

A&M head volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli, who coached Sykora for four years, said she has high expectations for her former athlete.

"To be a two-time Olympian is very special," said Corbelli in an interview with The Eagle. "We expected Stacy to be on the 2000 team given the situation of the program and with the creation of the libero position, but for her to keep up her high skill level and be considered one of the best liberos in the world is an awesome accomplishment."

Representing A&M's swim team, former students Matt Rose and Riley Janes have also earned spots on their home country Canada's Olympic squad. The two competed in the preliminary 100-meter backstroke with another former student Robbie Taylor. Rose won the trial in 55.70 seconds, with Janes coming in a close second at 55.72, and Taylor following with 57.00. Rose and Janes both qualified, but Taylor's time was not good enough to make the team.

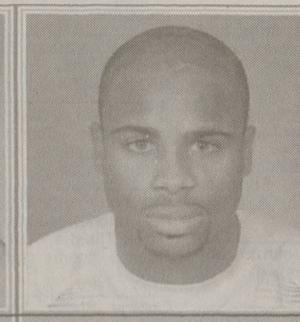
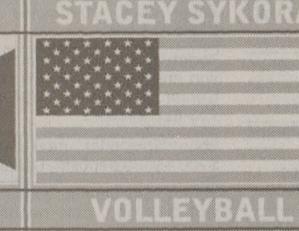
"It helped a lot that we had each other there," said Rose about his old teammate Janes' presence at the trials. "We could root each other on and give moral support."

Newly named A&M head swimming coach Jay Holmes said he was ecstatic when he heard the news of Rose and Janes making it to the Olympics.

"It's really a priceless feeling," Holmes said. "Any time you make an Olympic team, you've really accomplished something."

Holmes said he won't necessarily be wearing Canadian colors but that he will be rooting for Rose and Janes.

"They both did so much for our program that all Aggies should be rooting for them, as well as any other Aggies over there," Holmes said.

RILEY JANES	MATT ROSE	ANGELES PANTOJA	CHRIS PINNOCK	STACEY SYKORA
				
SWIMMING	SWIMMING	TRACK	TRACK	VOLLEYBALL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A&M record holder in 100-meter backstroke• 2002 Big 12 champion in 100-meter backstroke• 2nd in NCAA championships in 100-meter backstroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A&M record in 100-meter freestyle• 2002 Big 12 Male Swimmer of Meet• 2nd in A&M history in 50-meter free and 100-meter backstroke• 11-time All-American	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2-time Big 12 champion in 1,000-meter run• A&M record for indoor 800-meter run• No. 3 all-time performer in 800-meter hurdles in A&M history• A&M record for indoor 1,000-meter run	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4-time All-American in 110-meter hurdles• Won Big 12 Title in senior season• Set Big 12 record time in hurdles with time of 13.38 secs• No. 2 high-hurdler in A&M history	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2-time All-American• 2nd in A&M history in kills and digs• Set 23 A&M single match, Big 12 season and Big 12 career marks• Led Big 12 with 4.37 digs per game senior season
				

GRAPHIC BY: ANDREW BURLESON • THE BATTALION

Is Franchione a problem solver or problem dodger?

Texas A&M always seems to be on the top of new scientific studies. Animals have been cloned, RNA has been mapped and new developments in agriculture are happening all the time. Perhaps with so many scientists around campus, A&M should spend the money to bottle up head football coach Dennis Franchione's charm.

After hearing Franchione speak Monday night at the Brazos County Coaches' Night, I felt a lot better, as did many of the former students who I was seated with. A near euphoric feeling came over me, but that might be better attributed to the pre-dinner cocktails.

After pumping the audience full of mouthwatering food and a few jokes, Franchione helped many forget about a 3-7 season that included losses to the tune of 77-0 and 46-10 for just a few hours.

But after dreams of Kyle Field danced through my head and my dose of Franchione had worn off, I began to wonder if a big sheet had been pulled over my eyes and others' and if I had been lulled into simply believing what was told. It was time to review the nights' events.

Franchione touched on nearly every aspect that plagued Aggie football last season, so it was no surprise that he spoke for more than 30 minutes.

The biggest question that has been on many Aggie football fanatics' minds is whether junior quarterback Reggie McNeal would be ready for the season. McNeal had surgery on the rotator cuff in his throwing arm at the end of last season and missed most of the spring drills.

With big smile and his even-tempered voice, Franchione answered the question.



JORDAN MESEROLE
SPORTS EDITOR

"He has been throwing a lot, sometimes even twice a day," Franchione said. "Reggie is stronger and more prepared for this season than ever before. I will be disappointed if he doesn't take some major steps this season."

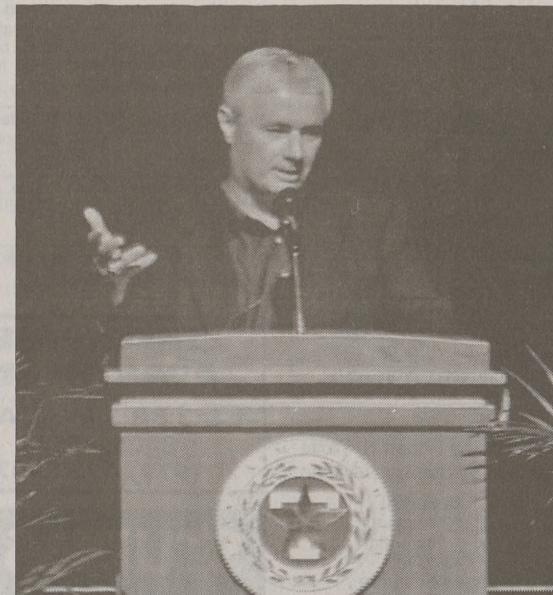
Franchione went on to address the topic of freshman quarterback Stephen McGee, whom many believe may vie for the starting job in the 2005 season, if not earlier.

"As you all know, we are very high on Stephen McGee," Franchione said. "I don't believe we'll be able to red-shirt him. I believe he will have to play for us sometime this year."

Wait — does that mean Franchione doesn't trust McNeal? It seems Franchione thinks McNeal will implode at some point during the season, prompting him to insert McGee.

Franchione said his reasoning was that McNeal hasn't played a full season due to injuries, a better-to-be-safe-than-sorry statement. But why wouldn't Franchione redshirt McGee for a year, letting him get the experience he might need before being thrown out to the Big 12? Sophomore Ty Branyon has a year of experience and proved in the Maroon and White game that he can handle some pressure.

Franchione continued on to the offensive line, defensive line and which players he believes will make an impact this season. And once he had covered the whole team, Franchione announced a decision on



EVAN O'CONNELL • THE BATTALION
Head coach Dennis Franchione speaks at Reed Arena on Monday night for the Brazos County Coaches' Night.

the players' uniforms.

Franchione told of how much he enjoyed the movie "Miracle" and that he was taking one of the philosophies instilled by U.S.A. hockey coach Herb Brooks.

"Until we start playing for the name on the front of our jerseys, we won't have names on the back," said Franchione, taking a line from the movie.

The audience seemed to be wowed by the move; it worked for the 1980 Olympic hockey team, why not for the Aggies? The only concern from some of the older Aggies was whether they would be able to keep up with who was who on the field if players had no names on their backs.

But the questions came up again in the morning: Is A&M football modeling itself after Disney movies? Was Franchione going to begin drawing up plays from "Remember the Titans" or "Little Giants?" Although on second thought, it might make for some entertaining games.

But, maybe that's delving into deep of a thought over all this. The fear of a losing season is instilled into us from last year, and it's a pain we don't want to experience again. Franchione has assured Aggies that it won't reoccur, and we should be inclined to believe him. The Aggies can't be much worse, after all. All Aggie fans really need is a prescription of Franchione to hold them over until September. Another dose would help me right now.

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